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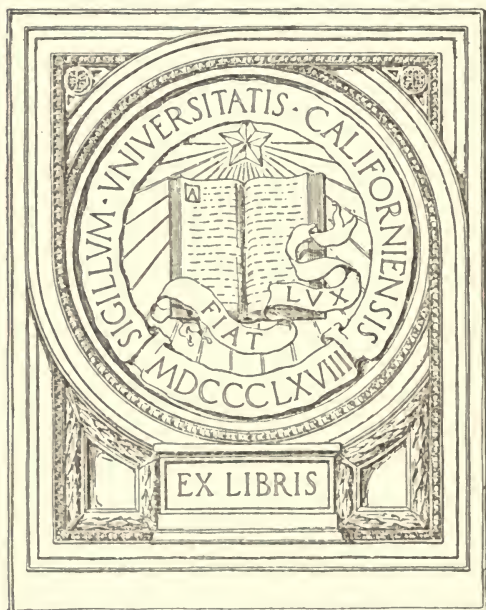
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A CANOPIC JAR

—
LEONORA SPEYER



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A CANOPIC JAR



*Over the gods that guard the funeral-jars,
Those mighty sons of Horus,
Hapi, Amset, Duamutef, Kebehsenuf,
Are greater gods,
Nephthys, Isis, Neith and Seket,
Guarding the guarding-gods!*

*Over them all,
And over all the dead,
The dead that live, the dead that never lived,
Over the great and greater,
Over the very small—
Even this little jar of song,
Dead dreams that will not die—
One God!*

A CANOPIC JAR

BY
LEONORA SPEYER



*"I hide the hidden thing, making
protection for Hapi, who is within."*

—SPEECH OF NEPHTHYS

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To the Five Good Years—

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A CANOPIC JAR

FRIENDS

GRIEF shall not be my friend! She shall not be
 Companion of my table, path or bed,
 She shall not share my salt nor break my bread,
 Nor walk nor weep nor dream nor wake with me:
 I will not trust her mournful company,
 Nor listen to her whisperings of the dead,
 Why should I heed her somber eyelid's red?
 Tears are but chains and I, I would be free!

For grief would make a laggard of my will,
 And me, a puny thing of anguished need,
 A memory! And I would die at length,
 Close to the thought of you—and loving still:
 So will I choose a friend of stouter creed,
 The wingless, tearless thing the heart calls strength.

PAIN

PAIN is a beckoning hand,
A voice that seems to say,
"This way!"

Pain is an opening window,
Wide wings that stretch to fly;
Beyond, the sky!

Pain is a light too near,
Blinded, I grope along—
To song!

A CRABBED SONG OF SPRING

SPRING, I am tired!
Your brisk young buds and vigorous green
And all the bustle of your clouds and winds
But add to my great weariness:
Ask the long grass how heavy falls my foot
Across the excitement of the meadow.

I pray you, still your restless sprigs and sprays
And dancing leaves,
Trying their newest steps on every bough and bush,
And tell the birds to call their mates
More modestly.

My eyes are dizzy with the noon's hot gold
And sudden purple,
And my ears ring with shouting yellow, pink and
white,
And singing blue,
And green and green and green!

Spring, I am sad,
And you but make me sadder:
There is a heartlessness about your birds and flowers,

A Crabbed Song of Spring

A flippancy of wing and petal!
They sip among themselves the moist, sweet air,
Deep-dipping bud and beak,
I think all Nature presses thirsty lips
Against the brimming earth and sky—
But my soul stands before an empty cup.

Almost I would unmask the mockery of this rejuvenation,
This yearly comedy of youth!
Spring, sitting there in your green cloak,
You are a gray-haired woman,
You are as old as I,
As sad,
As tired!

But you are brave and beautiful
And I will sit with you a while:
Together we will watch this pageantry,
This flagged procession of gay promises,
Fluttering to fulfillment.
This dreaming—

But you and I will dream no more.
Spring,
We are old.

DECORATION DAY

THIS is the day of dauntless memories,
Hours that live turn back to deathless hours,
But sheltered in my heart there lies,
As in a grave,
A memory serene and brave
That needs no flowers.

No valiant tale to stir the blood to wine—
Dear enemy that struck at me and fled!—
And yet the victory was mine,
As mine the pain,
And still my heart resounds its gain,
Its cherished dead.

RENDEZVOUS

BUT one more month and I shall be
Wrapt in a shadowed harmony
Of leaves and buds and crinkly moss,
Above me tangled boughs will toss,
And all about
Unfurled for me,
Uncurled for me,
The fern's unhurried rout;
But one more month—so soon—
Wait for me, June, my June!

The birds, live cups of singing wine,
On their tall stems of larch and pine,
Will brim for me the glad day long
The solace of their bubbling song:
The nightingale
Will trill for me,
Will spill for me,
Her shy, exultant grail;
But one more month—so soon—
Wait for me, June, my June!

Bring me your reveling fields and woods,
Your hills and lakes of solemn moods,

Rendezvous

Gather the stars, fresh-plucked and sweet,
Scatter them there where we two meet:
I bring to you,
Still near to me,
Still dear to me,
My ancient grief still new;
But one more month—so soon—
Wait for me, June, my June!

A MUTED WOOD-SONG

I SHALL write a song in the wood some day
With a long, lush fern for a pen,
Dipped in the rhythm of bird and brook
And the lisping sound of leaves at play
In the trees:
The boughs of the balsam will lean and look,
But I shall not sing of these.

With my waving fern,
My wise, wild pen,
I shall write of the hidden griefs of men,
And their hearts shall lie like an open book
Of troubled pages that sigh as they turn
On my knee.

But of one dim page, close-writ,
One memory—
Dead little song whose every note
Had birth within my throat,
And every word first in my heart was heard,
Its young beliefs, its lifting pride, its woe—
I shall not sing of it!
Not even the understanding wood shall know.

A B C's IN GREEN

THE trees are God's great alphabet:
With them He writes in shining green
Across the world His thoughts serene.

He scribbles poems against the sky
With a gay, leafy lettering,
For us and for our bettering.

The wind pulls softly at His page,
And every star and bird
Repeats in dutiful delight His word,
And every blade of grass
Flutters to class.

Like a slow child that does not heed,
I stand at summer's knees,
And from the primer of the wood
I spell that life and love are good,
I learn to read.

SONG

IF I could sing the song of the dawn,
The carroling word of leaf and bird
And the sun-waked fern uncurling there,
I would go lonely and would not care.

If I could sing the song of the dusk,
The stars and moon of glistening June
Lit at the foot and head of me,
The Spinner might break the thread of me.

If I could sing but the song of love,
Fill my throat with each sounding note,
Others might kiss and clasp and cling,
Mine be the lips that would sing, would sing!

A GIFT

I WOKE:—

Night, lingering, poured upon the world
Of drowsy hill and wood and lake
Her moon-song,
And the breeze accompanied with hushed fingers
On the birches.

Gently the dawn held out to me
A golden handful of bird's-notes.

THE CONFIDANT

THE wood is talking in its sleep.
Have a care, trees!
You are heard by the brook and the breeze
And the listening lake;
And some of the birds are awake,
I know.
Green, garrulous wood, I trusted you so!

CRICKETS

ALL night the crickets chirp,
Like little stars of twinkling sound
In the dark silence.

They sparkle through the stillness
With a crisp rhythm:
They lift the shadows on their tiny voices.

But at the flickering note of birds that wake,
Flashing from tree to tree till all the wood is lit
With their golden coloratura of dawn,
The cricket-stars fade softly,
One by one.

GARDEN UNDER LIGHTNING

(GHOST-STORY)

OUT of the storm that muffles shining night
Flash roses ghastly-sweet,
And lilies far too pale.
There is a pang of livid light,
A terror of familiarity,
I see a dripping swirl of leaves and petals
That I once tended happily,
Borders of flattened, frightened little things,
And writhing paths I surely walked in that other life—
Day?

My specter-garden beckons to me,
Gibbers horribly—
And vanishes!

THE BIRCH IN THE LAKE

YOU lie there,
Too still beneath the waters,
More than a reflection,
Less than a tree:
Your limbs gleam upward,
Your dank leaves are like the hair of a drowned
woman.

No longer do you know the touch of spring,
Nor will the birds build their round nurseries
Between your white fingers.

The wood has forgotten you,
The breezes have forgotten.

But the moon mourns,
Slipping a silver shroud about you
Pitifully,
As you lie, still beautiful,
In your unhallowed grave.

Poor suicide!

PATCH AND POWDER

LADY MEADOW,
Coquetting there with noon,
You balance and sway your rustling trees
Like crisp brocade hoop-skirts.

Over your curling gold of buttercups
You powder thick the daisy-petals,
And near the pond,
Iris-lashed, heaven-reflected—
Yet not too near—
You flaunt serenely,
One black cow,
Reclining;
Much as a Royal favorite wears
Her patch,
Beneath the smiling blue of her arch eye.

THE LOCUST

ITS hot voice sizzles from some cool tree
Near-by:

It seems to burn its way through the air
Like a small, pointed flame of sound
Sharpened on the ecstatic edge of sunbeams.

SQUALL

THE squall sweeps gray-winged across the obliterated hills,
And the startled lake seems to run before it;
From the wood comes a clamor of leaves,
Tugging at the twigs,
Pouring from the branches,
And suddenly the birds are still.

Thunder crumples the sky,
Lightning tears at it.

And now the rain!
The rain—thudding—implacable—
The wind, reveling in the confusion of great pines!

And a silver sifting of light,
A coolness;
A sense of summer anger passing,
Of summer gentleness creeping nearer—
Penitent, tearful,
Forgiven!

THE NATURALIST ON A JUNE SUNDAY

MY old gardener leans on his hoe,
Tells me the way that green things grow;
“Goin’ to church? Why no!
All Nature’s church enough for me!”
Says he.

“Preachin’ o’ flower and choir o’ bird
An’ the wind passin’ the plate!
Sweetest service ever I heard—
That’s straight!
Eternal Rest?
What for, friend?
Gimme a swarm o’ bees to tend,
A-honey-makin’ world without end;
Scoop ’em right up and find the queen,
They’d not sting me—the bees ain’t mean!”

“Heaven’s all right!
But still, I’ll kinder miss
The Lady Lunar moth at night,
And the White Wanderer butterfly
Crawlin’ out of its chrysalis!
I want my heaven human too—

The Naturalist on a June Sunday

'Twixt me an' you—
Why I'd just love to see
A chipmunk hop up to the Lord
An' eat right out o' His dread Hand
Same as it does to me!
Eternity—eternity—
Don't it sound grand?
But say,
What's a matter with to-day?
Just step into the woods an' take a look—
Ain't that a page o' teachin' from the Holy Book?
'He that hath eyes to see
An' ears to hear—'
I guess God's pretty near!
He'll understand, I know,
Why I ain't in no hurry to let June go!"

My old gardener turns to his hoe,
Helping the green things how to grow,
"The Missus can go to church for me,
Amen!" says he.

SKY FANCIES

FIRST COMMUNION

THE little clouds are all in white
To-day:
They kneel at God's high blue altar
To receive the moon.

NEW MOON

The baby moon lies curled up on a cloud's lap,
Kicking its golden heels:
I think I hear it crowing to the stars.

SKYWAY ROBBERY

Night, leaning there upon the hills,
What robber cloud has dared?

The great white pearl you wore,
Hung from your glittering chain of stars,
Is gone:
And in its place a red wound drips
Its anguished light.

Sky Fancies

GOLD-FISH

The stars are like gold-fish in a deep blue bowl,
Swimming round and round the centuries.

Sometimes one dies of the hot summer night;
I watch it falling—
Fading—

And I watch the others,
Floating in their blue bowl,
Eternally golden,
Immortally indifferent.

THE PET

HOPE gnawed at my heart like a hungry rat,
Ran in and out of my dreams high-walled,
I heard its scampering feet:
“Pretty rat—pretty rat—!” I called,
And crumbled its songs to eat.

Hope peeped at me from behind my dreams,
Nibbled the crumbs of my melodies,
Grew tame and sleek and fat:
Oh, but my heart knew ease
To feel the teeth of my rat!

Then came a night—and then a day—
I heard soft feet that scuttled away—
Rats leave the sinking ship, they say.

A LEGACY

MY soul was silent with delight
Too long!
And then, after we parted,
Love found me in the night,
Wandering bitter-hearted,
And touched my lips with song;
That I, silent no more, might sound your praise,
And all the sweetness of your ways,
Find melodies for my great wrong—
And so live tunefully the tuneless days.

ENIGMA

IT would be easy to forgive,
If I could but remember;
If I could hear, lost love of mine,
The music of your cruelties,
Shaking to sound the silent skies,
Could voice with them their song divine,
Red with pain's leaping ember:
It would be easy to forgive,
If I could but remember.

It would be easy to forget,
If I could find lost Sorrow;
If I could kiss her plaintive face,
And break with her her bitter bread,
Could share again her woeful bed,
And know with tears her pale embrace,
Make yesterday, to-morrow:
It would be easy to forget,
If I could find lost Sorrow.

SUDDENLY

SUDDENLY flickered a flame,
Suddenly fluttered a wing:
What, can a dead bird sing?
Somebody spoke your name.

Suddenly fluttered a wing,
Sounded a voice, the same,
Somebody spoke your name:
Oh, the remembering!

Sounded a voice, the same,
Song of the heart's wild Spring,
Oh, the remembering:
Which of us was to blame?

Song of the heart's wild Spring,
Wings that still flutter, lame,
Which of us was to blame?—
God, the slow withering!

SUMMER SORROW

WHAT shall meadow hold to please me,
Spreading wide its scented waving,
How shall quiet mosses ease me,
Or the night-wind cool my craving?
Hill and hedgerow, cloud-sweet sky,
Echo our good-by.

Bud unplucked and leaf a-quiver,
Bird that lifts a tuneless trilling,
Restless dream of brook and river,
All June's cup a wasted spilling—
You and I so thirsty-hearted!—
Summer knows us parted.

AFTER

I WILL not walk in the wood to-night,
I will not stand by the water's edge
And see day lie on the dusk's bright ledge
Until it turn, a star at its breast,
To rest.

I will not see the wide-flung hills
Closing darkly about my grief,
I wore a crown of their lightest leaf,
But now they press like a cold, blue ring,
Imprisoning.

I dare not meet that caroling blade,
Jauntily drawn in the sunset pine,
Stabbing me with its thrust divine,
Knowing my naked, aching need,
Till I bleed.

Sheathe your song, invincible bird,
Strike not at me with that flashing note,
Have pity, have pity, persistent throat,
Deliver me not to your dread delight
To-night!

I am afraid of the creeping wood,
I am afraid of the furtive trees,
Hiding behind them, memories,
Ready to spring, to clutch, to tear,
Wait for me there.

THE HOUR

THIS is the paling hour lovers know,
When dawn's white bells swing high:
—Beloved, I must go!—
—Ah no!—
—Good-by—good-by!—

This is the hour when dawn's unpitying bells ring
clear,
And lovers part:
So am I almost glad you are not here,
Heart of my given heart!

THE LAST MORNING IN THE COUNTRY

DAWN slips within my room to say good-by:
Buffeted, bruised, by autumn rain
All night,
While I lay sleeping, held to dreams, again
She comes from out the violated sky,
Dragging her tarnished light.

With dim leaves drooping, hanging all about
Her misty face, her eyes still wet,
She stands
Disconsolate beneath her veils—and yet
Bravely she spills one last bird's note from out
Her summer-empty hands.

TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

TO-NIGHT

Dusk shuddered away from the autumn sky
Too cruel-bright:
Into the comfort of the West
She shrank, a star at her shadowy breast,
Glowing and deep and red,
Out of the day, to grieve and die,
Hanging her head.

But I
Will wear my one-time bliss of you
More valiantly;
Pinned to my gown like a meadow-flower
Or the proud, red gem of my woman's dower,
And never its wound revealed—
The aching, eloquent kiss of you,
Unhealed.

AN OLD PHOTOGRAPH

IT is not you I kiss—not you!—
Coming upon you suddenly,
Faded as those swift hours we knew,
The dawns and dusk, we two!

I kiss another face I see—
O little face, so young, so true,
Shining through that pale effigy!—
The face mine used to be.

NIGHT

DARK temple!
I stand before
Your black-flung door,
Beggared by day,
Assailed by thieving hours all the way.

Here am I safe from noon's hostility
And the sun's buffeting,
Those brazen rods that bruised and blinded me:
I seek your sanctuary, night!
Through your wide-arching silences I bring
My broken silences of soul
To be made whole,
I bring my wounds of light.

Along your aisles I drop my dragging pride,
And toss my tattered words aside—
Garments I need no longer wear—
Behind me close dim gates:
O dome of all oblivion,
Where living pain and dead are one,
Pale ghosts within a paler prayer,

Wrapped in my nakedness I creep
Up to your altars of absolving sleep,
Where a great waking waits.

From the sky's shadowy tower sounds the moon,
Calling to dreams—
Swing clearer, silver bell, swing higher!—
A myriad music glows and gleams,
I hear the stars intone
In shining choir:
Now—soon—
Shall I wander those dim cloisters of my dream's
 desire;
And not alone.

TO A LITTLE TWELFTH CENTURY FIGURE
OF THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST: THE
CROSS MISSING

WHERE is your cross, poor homeless One? I see
The piteous stretching of your hands and feet,
This is the gesture, somber and complete,
In bloodless bronze, of your long agony;
And where the nails that held you to the tree?
Here are the faint stigmata, cruel-sweet,
And in my heart there sounds the hammer's beat:
O Son of God, be crucified in me!

Come, walk my Calvary of womanhood,
Taste the wild hyssop of my hidden tear,
Wear my gay crown and know my laughing spear,
Call Magdalene in purple to my rood:
Hang, Christ that died for love, upon my pain,
Between pale thieves, the dreams that dream in vain!

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

THE Chinese tapestry smolders on my wall like the blue smoke of old Chinese fires. It is peopled with little warriors and their wives, and pompous horses prance mightily across the glory of its woven story.

Dark faces glare at one another, banners hurl their folds. Spears threaten in and out of a tangle of willow-tree and almond-blossom, tower and battlement and castle gate:

O faded, silken tale of faded vengeance, pride and hate!

On come the warriors in their brocaded coats—they sit their red saddles well! I hear a clash, a shouting in an unknown tongue—war-cry of Ming or Han or Sung—tiny swords buzz like darting wasps steel-winged;

And women peep from out their pointed tent and canopied wheel-chair, lolling complacent there, and lift their babes that they may better hear the loud, proud sound of battling sires:

The Chinese Tapestry

And the Chinese tapestry smolders on like the blue
smoke of Chinese fires.

* * * * *

There is a strangeness of sweet smelling in my room
that is not of bud nor bloom. My garden hangs its
head before a presence mocking it, laughing from the
wall, the perfume woven in my tapestry, perfume of
mystery, perfume of China.

The heavy-lidded East is speaking and the lilies
on my table droop and die.

Each morning I find a withered havoc in the room
where hangs the Chinese tapestry. Each morning the
presence waits for me there and clings—

Close, violent, insistent.

Once at night I felt behind me a stealthy moving of
the door, something seemed pulling it toward the
latch, and the perfume slipping, sliding, along the
floor, reaching toward me in the dark!

How fumbling my fingers at the lamp—how slow
the sodden wick—

* * * * *

But with the glimmer and the glow I got away—

From what?

The Chinese Tapestry

I do not know.

* * * * *

Woven perfume! You sing to me across the mists of race and creed, the clouds of time, a little tune of unknown key that is not unmelodious. You hang your rhythms about me like a robe too-heavily embroidered with desire; you wreath me in the red, unfolding fire of poppy-flowers, whispering of their unhurried dreams and strange, mad ceremonies of the senses. My drowsy peace seems but an emptiness of inert hours and my content, an ignorance!

The very moon looks smug to-night, casting its monotone of patterned shade and light on my trimmed paths and lawns and roses' trained delight!

And yet—

This is the moon that rocked me as a child, *my* mild and honest moon, and these the stars that spangled through my nursery-window:

Not your hot lantern swinging in too purple skies and all its whirling fireflies!

I will not listen to your story nor to the song you sing, O rustling rainbow thing of ancient warp and woof:

The Chinese Tapestry

No, I will put you from me—very gently—

Will fold you in my cedar-chest—

Forget you! And the discomfort of your beauty!

Sleep, warriors of bright-recording thread, long
dead, passionate and pagan heroes of a slow-crumbled
loom, sleep—close to your slant-eyed women:

Dream your unbroken dream divine:

Pray to your gods!

Pray to your gods!

And let me pray to mine.

THE SAINT-GAUDENS STATUE IN
ROCK CREEK CEMETERY, WASHINGTON

ARE there no tears for other hearts to shed?
Those heavy eyes have drained the world of
grief,

And yet no solace found, no drear relief,
Such as my heart would seek, and find, I know,
Had I been given the weight of that vast woe,
And wept through pain to peace! But you, instead,
Have drowned all healing in a shoreless sea
Of unforgiven wrong, whose every breath
Lifts windy clamor through the soul's hushed space,
Fanning to greater grief, to swifter glow,
The flame that smolders still in that bronze face,
Sadder than life, and sadder far than death,
Because of love renounced and joy to be,
And faith and hope and immortality.

APRIL ON THE BATTLEFIELDS

APRIL now walks the fields again,
Trailing her leaves
And holding all her buds against her heart:
Wrapt in her clouds and mists
She walks,
Groping her way among the graves of men.

The green of earth is differently green,
A dreadful knowledge trembles in the grass
And little wide-eyed flowers die too soon:
There is a stillness here—
After a terror of all raving sound—
And birds sit close for comfort
On broken boughs.

April, thou grief!
What of thy sun and glad, high wind,
Thy lifting hills and woods and eager brooks,
Thy thousand-petaled hopes?
The sky forbids thee sorrow, April!
And yet,
I see thee walking listlessly,
Across those scars that once were pregnant sod,

April on the Battlefields

Those graves,
Those stepping-stones from life to life.

Death is an interruption between two heart-beats,
That I know—
Yet know not how I know—
But April mourns,
Trailing her leaves,
The passion of her leaves,
Across the passion of those fearful fields.

Yes, all the fields!
No barrier here,
No challenge in the night,
No stranger-land,
No foe!
She passes with her perfect countersign,
Her green,
She wanders in her garden,
Dropping her buds like tears,
Spreading her lovely grief upon the graves of men.

SEKHMET THE LION-HEADED*

IN the dark night I heard a purring,
Near me something was stirring.

A voice, deep-throated, spoke:

I litter armies for all easts and wests
And norths and souths:
They suckle my girl-goddess breasts,
And my fierce milk drips from their mouths.

The voice sang:

I do not kill! I, Sekhmet the Lion-headed, I!
But between my soft hands they die.

I asked:
O Sekhmet, Lion-headed one,
How long shall warring be?

And Sekhmet deigned to make reply:

Eternally!

* Egyptian goddess of war and strife.

Sekhmet the Lion-Headed

Bold in my faith I grew:

Dread goddess-cat, you lie!
Warring shall cease.
My God of love is greater far
Than you.

How gentle was the voice of Sekhmet then;

He of the Star?
He Whom they called the Prince of Peace—
And slew?
And slew again—and yet again?
Ah yes!—she said.

And all about my bed
The night grew laughing-red:
Sekhmet I did not see,
But in that bleeding dusk I heard
How Sekhmet purred.

TO THE VICTORS AND THE VANQUISHED

BEYOND disputed, hungry lands
Waits in its radiant calm a Place
That knows the blossoming touch of two scarred Feet:
There enemies shall meet
After the soul affright has passed,
And face to face
And hands in hands,
They shall find truth at last,
Look deep into each other's eyes,
God-wise.

Think of that Place, ye brave and tired men,
Be kind again.

There is a victory in dark defeat,
Sublime, complete,
The triumph over self and fear and death.
Ye conquered! Draw a free, proud breath,
Lift up your heads to peace, for ye
Have won that victory.

There is defeat in gladdest victory,
And shame and woe,

To the Victors and the Vanquished

If still the victor hate.
Ye conquerors! Stand nobly at the gate
Of broken hopes, pass in on gentle feet,
Salute the one-time foe:
Be great, superbly great,
Lest in this mighty hour ye shall know
That mightier defeat!

Victor and vanquished, brave and tired men,
Take love unto your hearts again.

THE SUMMER OF PEACE

SUMMER comes to the stricken earth.
Lays clement fingers of bud and leaf
On broken hedge and field's brown dearth
And the bare hills' rocky grief;
Brings her comfort of May and June,
Pours on red wounds the blackbird's tune,
Bids with her gallant, imperious green
Anger and vengeance and fevered hate
Abate.

Deep in my heart is a faded pain
None knows:
Summer, put there a rose
Red as its one-time scar!
Bid it flame to a grief again,
Bid it sing like the morning star—
Shining song of a fresh young woe
That none shall know—
Spread there the blossoms of splendid regret,
I do not want to forget!

THE LADDER

I HAD a sudden vision in the night—
I did not sleep, I dare not say I dreamed—
Beside my bed a pallid ladder gleamed
And lifted upward to the sky's dim height:
And every rung shone strangely in that light,
And every rung a woman's body seemed,
Outstretched, and down the sides her long hair
streamed,
And you—you climbed that ladder of delight!

You climbed, sure-footed, naked rung by rung,
Clasped them and trod them, called them by their
name,
And my name too I heard you speak at last;
You stood upon my breast the while and flung
A hand up to the next! And then—oh shame—
I kissed the foot that bruised me as it passed.

Three Egyptian Sketches

(Written at the Metropolitan Museum)

THE GRAVESTONE OF TA-BEK-EN-KHONSU, "MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE."

THE stela of Ta-Bek-en-Khonsu shows her
After death,
Standing in plaintive profile
Before Osiris, lord of all Abydos,
And red-robed Isis;
And in her slim brown hand her heart,
For by that heart Ta-Bek-en-Khonsu shall be judged.

All this the hieroglyphs make plain,
The little birds and serpents and many zigzag lines,
Moving in quaint procession through the centuries.

So would I stand at last,
Holding my heart for judgment,
Nor fear my judge!

Tell me, Ta-Bek-en-Khonsu,
Daughter of many priests,
What said Osiris?

The Gravestone of Ta-Bek-en-Khonsu

And did the pale Isis smile?

I dare to think my God will call my name:
Mary will smile on me,
I dare believe!

THE EXPOSED MUMMY

RIPPED from the comfort of his painted coffin
And his priest's wrappings,
That guard his soul from harm,
He lies in shriveled nakedness under a slab of glass:
Poor holy man!

And with black-crueted, skinny hands
He pulls his crumbling linen up his loins
In somber modesty.

Not all the long three thousand years of sun-gold
Thebes,
The molten closeness of his sacred tomb,
Have shrunk and withered him
As this slow, idle fire of ribald eyes
Day after day.

AT PERNEB'S TOMB

SOUL of Perneb—let me pass that narrow door!
“*Your* tomb,” say you?
How so, proud dignitary?
This tomb was purchased by the Museum,
From the Egyptian Government,
Was bought and paid for!
It is their property
And I am welcome here.

I fear you not,
In your curled wig and beard
And stiff-starched little kilt;
Nor yet those rows of friends and relatives,
Gesticulating there upon your scribbled walls!

This is not Memphis,
Nor the Fifth Dynasty,
Old Perneb!
Look you without:
Behold Fifth Avenue,
The mighty street of gods that are not yours,
In this the year of grace,
Nineteen-nineteen!

LOVER OF CHILDREN

WHEN my little girl plays Beethoven Sonatas,
The big, black Steinway flashes all its teeth at
her
In a broad, good-natured grin:
And suddenly
I hear a deep, rumbling, beautiful roar of laughter.

SIDNEY DREW, "MOVIE-STAR"

TO-DAY my children came to me:
"Sidney Drew's dead!"
They said.

I hope that Sidney Drew can see,
Even from far eternity
Beyond these pallid April skies,
The tribute of my children's eyes.

A TEAR-BOTTLE

THIS empty little flask,
Unbroken by the weight of years,
The mold of sepulcher still clinging to its side,
Where it has lightly lain
In brittle pride,
Once brimmed hot tears:
Once held the sealed-up sobs of shattered dreams,
The salty dew of pain—
How like a jewel it gleams,
Mixed with the moon's frank gold again.

Where are those tears to-day,
That brine of grief?
Kind, conquering relief
Of stoic time tramping its stoic way!

I wonder so
How eyes that looked on death
Could weep those ordered funeral-tears,
The heart could guide its anguish how to flow
Toward the tear-bottle's brim,
Extended deftly there,
This mustered stream for her, for him,

A Tear-Bottle

This conserve of despair!
—“*O love, O my lost love! Thrice-cursed gods!
O sweetest Alcibiades,
Never to see thee more!
Bring me, dear Phrynia, I beg,
Another bottle, please—!”
This one floods o’er!—*

What if the dole,
Mute protest of the soul,
Should prove too vast for tear benumbed to fall?
Did relatives declare,
—“*She does not care!
She does not mourn at all!
See now the bottle, filled but grudging-half—?”*
Had they no humor then, these Greeks,
Did no one laugh?

O bottled widow’s woe,
Standing in ostentatious row
Within the gloom
Of dear departed’s tomb!
Evaporated lover’s grief!
All love is bitter-brief,
I know.

A Tear-Bottle

But in my breast,
Deep—deep—
I hear the beat of my tear-bottle,
Throbbing the tears I will not weep.

And when I die,
I think that it will lie
And crumble into calm, cool dust with me,
Dust of the long road leading to eternity,
Holding its tears unshed,
Still flowing for my dead.

THE "EXTRA HOUR"

(They put back the clocks at two A. M.)

TO-NIGHT, I think each sleepy clock
Will lift a pedant's protest to the skies
From many a town's high tower:
—Tick-tock—tick-tock—
Rude hands presume to put us back—
Tick-tack—
One hour!—

Time will not wait, they say,
Nor sun:
Yet is this vast thing done?
Shall the slow day
Submit, the calm moon cower?

O shadowy wings that lean in flight,
O night!
Before your star-eyed birds are flown,
Before the dawn shall flower
Its wide, inexorable buds of light,
Clasped lovers shall have known
That added hour!

JUDGMENT DAY

I THINK my sins, now wandering restless ways,
Will find at last the waiting Judgment-seat,
Will shake and shatter at that quiet Gaze!
All but one sin—a sin so strange, so sweet,
That all the saints will stand in rows and wonder,
As happily it buds across high space,
Climbs fearless up those clapping walls of thunder,
And blossoms whitely in a kind, still Face.

THE HEART RECALCITRANT

DOES the heart grieve on,
After its grief is gone
Like a slow ship moving
Across its own oblivion?

Heart! Heart! Do you not know
That I have conquered pain,
Have parted from my woe?
That my proud feet have found their path again,
After the pathless heights—long after—
And that my hands have learned to bless
Their overflowing emptiness,
My lips grown reconciled to laughter?

O laggard of dead roads,
O heart that will not heal nor break
Nor yet forget!
Tell me, whose tears are these
That greet me as I wake?
Why is my pillow wet?

Red rebel, is it you
That lifted this wild dew

The Heart Recalcitrant

Like banners from my arid dreams,
That roused this ember
From exiled ashes,
Calling me to remember?

Speak, is it you that wept
Upon my pillow while I slept?

*Does the heart then grieve on,
After its grief is gone,
A treasure-ship that journeys
Across its own oblivion?*

VICTORY

DAY is the heart's red field,
And many an anguish there
Is lost or won,
And many a hope lies hopeless in the sun;
But night, the conqueror kind,
Spreads its blessed treaty of the stars,
Where the heart's peace is signed.

Under the moon's white flag
I meet my ambushed dreams,
I see the foe,
Whom I have faced and put to flight, I know,
Yielding his hosts to me;
And in strong, vanquished hands I lay
My weeping victory.

FIRST SNOW ON THE HILLS

THE hills kneel in a huddled group,
Like camels of the caravan,
And winter piles upon their patient backs
Its snows.

And through the desert of long nights and days
I think I see them stepping—stepping—
In misty file,
Toward the green land of Spring!

SPRING COWARDICE

I AM afraid to go into the woods,
I fear the trees and their mad, green moods.

I fear the breezes that pull at my sleeves,
The creeping arbutus beneath the leaves,

And the brook that mocks me with wild, wet words:
I stumble and fall at the voice of birds,

At the golden tumult of April stars,
Touching to song my silent scars.

Think of the rainbow that lurks in showers,
Think of the meadows of fierce-eyed flowers;

And the little things with sudden wings
That buzz about me and dash and dart,
And the lilac waiting to break my heart.

Winter, hide me in your kind snow!
I am a coward, a coward, I know.

DRINKING-SONG

WE lift our heads to drink,
Beloved, you and I!

Let others sink
Their faces to the cup,
Or bending lower still,
In thirsty herds,
Lap at the drops we spill!

But you and I,
Like birds,
Scorning the crowded brink,
Up, up,
Heads lifted to the sky,
From the sun's brim that tips
To meet the laughing splendor of our lips,
Will drink—will drink!

A NOTE FROM THE PIPES

PAN, blow your pipes and I will be
Your fern, your pool, your dream, your tree!

I heard you play, caught your swift eye,
“A pretty melody!” called I,
“Hail, Pan!”—and sought to pass you by.

Now blow your pipes and I will sing
To your sure lips’ accompanying.

Wild god who lifted me from earth,
Who taught me freedom, wisdom, mirth,
Immortalized my body’s worth,

Blow, blow your pipes! And from afar
I’ll come, I’ll be your bird, your star,
Your wood, your nymph, your kiss, your rhyme,
And all your godlike summer-time!

TWO ON A HILL*

He: Spring lies a wedding-feast at our feet:
Beloved one,
Drink—eat!

She: I am so dazed with buds and wings,
So dizzy with high trees—
And the sky brimming its cloudy cup
As we climbed up—
I am so filled with all good things,
Have drunk so deep of these:

And now this height!
This pouring forth
Of the horizon's bowl
From east to west and south to north,
This too tremendous whole
Of width and light!

I cannot see.
My eyes are closed—
And you beneath the lids—
Look, lover's eyes, for me.

* This poem was awarded one of the two prizes at the annual contest of the Poetry Society of America for the two best poems read at the Society during the year 1919-20.

Two on a Hill

He: Green swirls across the fields,
Leaping from hedge to hedge:
Green clasps the hills and dreams within the
wood,
Green wrapt in dew—

She, with eyes still closed:
As you clasp me and as I dream in you!

He: Green shudders into life,
Everywhere is the pang of green.

She: I know that pang—
Beloved, tell the field,
Tell every leaf and blade,
To yield!

He: I see a stream that breaks its winter word,
That takes a new, wild vow
And lifts a new, wild cry.

She: I know that cry—
Deep in the night I heard
Its sudden murmuring:
Oh bid it sing!

He: I see far, little squares of homes,
Of snug, warm roofs,
Red—gray—

Two on a Hill

She, opening her eyes and looking down:
Under the roofs is love
Alway.

He: But our strong roof, the swinging sky,
And all about, soft-spread,
The earth's eternal blossoming,
Our bed!

She sings on the hill:
The green and the blue,
Our pillow, our cover,
And close to me, you,
My lover!

The gold of the sun
To nestle upon:
Above us, below us,
Above us,
April to love us!

They climb higher.

He: The hill is reeling with its own bold height,
But you and I,
Like gentle gods,
Will help it up the sky.

Two on a Hill

She: Call not so loud!

How soft the hill against my breast,

How light,

How still;

In some white cradle-cloud

We two will rock the frightened little hill

To rest.

They reach the top of the hill. She runs ahead and leaps onto an over-jutting rock. He stands below her, holding out his arms.

She sings:

I am a leaf on the edge of noon,

Lifting still higher:

I am the tip of the crescent-moon,

Pointing my silver fire:

I am a bird on the boughs of dawn,

Singing a light where no songs are,

I am a falling, falling star—

He, catching her as she falls toward him:

I am desire!

* * * * *

The sun slips down the sky.

Two on a Hill

He: Shall we climb on?
Beyond the hill I see
A gleaming road that dips,
Untrodden of cloud or star:
Beloved, shall we journey there?

She: Must we climb on—so far—?
Dear lips
That have so weakened me,
Oh weight of love that I must bear—

The ferns are sweet to lie upon:
Must we climb on?

* * * * *

He: On—yes—
And on—
Alone—alone—

* * * * *

She: I think that we are dead,
And that we float
Across a heaven all our own,—
Remote—
Even from God—
Oh blessed loneliness—

* * * * *

They stand looking down into the valley.

Two on a Hill

She: The world is such a tiny garden
In which to plant our vast content,
The seeds of such full hours:

He: You are all fruits, all flowers,
You are the bough, the vine,
The sowing and the ripening,
The harvesting divine!

She: Gather me, harvester mine!

* * * * *

He: How empty all the valley,
Its green how vain,
I hear the meadows crying out their pain,
The tree-tops droop, the birds are dumb,
All April fades:
So must I bring you to the earth again,
Heart of mine, come!

She: Yet am I sad to go,
To leave the hill,
Our hill,
God has sung here, I know:
This is His first-created canticle,
We stand upon His morning melody
Of slope and peak,
His rocky trill:

Two on a Hill

He: We are His song of love, beloved,
You and I!

She: Lift me, strong arms, once more,
High up against the sky,
That I may kiss its blue—
And kiss me—you!

They turn to descend.

FROM AN ISLAND

The Island speaks:

I AM close-held to sea's salt strength,
I am wrapt round with sky's delight,
The day my neighbor and the night.

I am alone with my wide thoughts,
I am alone with my high moods,
My mists and winds and solitudes.

I am the virgin of the world,
No coast need reach a rocky hand,
No bridge shall mate me with the land.

I am myself, I am my own,
I am the quest within my soul,
I am my answer and my goal.

I am an island! And I dare
To lift my loneliness through space
And talk with Godhead face to face!

SEA-FOG

THE summer day draws the grayness closer
And shuts its shining eyes,
To the crooning of the horn.

Gulls flap unevenly through the muffled hours,
Spaces listen in hiding.

And the horn,
Like an old nurse,
Croons on in wordless monotone,
“Ooh—ooh—ooh—”

BELL-BUOYS

OUT in the dim harbor
I hear the sound of bells:
Out on the gray-blue meadows of the sea,
I think mild water-cattle graze
Among the ripples.

SWALLOWS

THEY dip their wings in the sunset,
They dash against the air
As if to break themselves upon its stillness:
In every movement, too swift to count,
Is a revelry of indecision,
A furtive delight in trees they do not desire
And in grasses that shall not know their weight.

They hover and lean toward the meadow
With little edged cries;
And then,
As if frightened at the earth's nearness,
They seek the high austerity of evening sky
And swirl into its depth.

GULLS

FEARLESS riders of the gale,
In your bleak eyes is the memory
Of sinking ships:
Desire, unsatisfied,
Droops from your wings.

You lie at dusk
In the sea's ebbing cradles,
Unresponsive to its mother mood;
Or hover and swoop,
Snatching your food and rising again,
Greedy,
Unthanking.

You veer and steer your callous course,
Unloved of other birds;
And in your soulless cry
Is the mocking echo
Of woman's weeping in the night.

WHEN BABA DIVES

THE waters seem to rise
To meet that little sprawl,
That splash of resolution,
Of joyous legs and arms:
The waters catch and play with her.

From out the foam a face blooms,
Pink and wet—
Bud of my heart!—
And there floats to me,
Widening,
The ripples of her smile!

JAZZ ON THE ISLAND

BEYOND the howl and hiccough of the tune
That marks the pattern for those weaving feet,
There is a leaning moon,
The little lapping waves are sweet.
—“*WHOSE baby are you?*”—
O tangle of sure steps along the hard, hot floor,
When just beyond the door
Is grass adream in silver dew!

Deep in the jungle-jazz they follow the trail
Of saxaphone's high, shattered wail,
They know their way across the noisome places
Of cracking bell and bone and drum,
In coupled clasp they come,
Flushed faces on flushed faces:
—“*Whose baby are you—whose—whose—*”
Over the night spread stars and purple spaces,
—“*Every time my hubby leaves I get the blues—*”
Young savages in flannels, beads and winging
laces!

ABSOLUTION

DOWN on the sands I called my sin,
I called aloud in the waves' wide din.

—Now gray-cowled sea,
Absolve thou me!—

I called aloud in the sky's dark face,
With never a star to plead for grace,
The rock and the rain and the salt-sweet wind
Knew I had sinned.

O pompous cry, O puny sin!
The great waves laughed as they thudded in;
Laughed and tossed from a mermaid's hair
A long green ribbon for me to wear.

WATER-PLANE FLIGHT

BECAUSE of all the little things—
Little fair earth and little sea!—
On the same roaring little wings
That held and lifted me,
I would come back to earth again,
Closer to little lives of men,
I would come back to little dreams
After the high reality.

Because of that loud, azure flight,
I shall dream nearer God to-night.

THE QUEEN-BEE FLIES

HIGH on the breeze flies the virgin-queen, queen of the hive!

Across the calm of skies and the cool of trees—she flies—she flies—swifter than all the others: and they follow, the passionate bees.

Over the green-gold stretch of wheat and rye, tangled and tied in the blue of vetch, over the riot of brown-gold brook and the quiet of brown-gold road—see the glint and gleam of her and the speckled cloud of drones in the cloudless sky as they chase and dream of her!

Hear the whirring song of the drones, the melody of their fevered wings—they stagger and fall, weaklings, despised:

They shall not know her, these louts of the honeycomb, crawling along the fields and ruts, still singing their heavy song!

For she has been fed on a flower-brewed wine, lore of the hive, store of the hive, she has been fed

The Queen-Bee Flies

and bred a queen, she has piped to the bees in her sealed-up cell and heard them answer—leaving their work, the busy workers, running, swaying, dancing, drumming, to the tiny pipe of her coming!

Straight as a bird flies the virgin-queen, queen of the hive, and after her all that are fleet of wing:

Only they that are fleet of wing.

Only the strongest of all shall wed her,
Whirl with her,
Swirl with her,
High in the air;
Mate with her,
Mix with her,
Clasp and cling,
Fly with her,
Die of her,
There on the wing!

And out of the sky she slips like a falling star, for the flight is over: out of the sky drop the drones.

Over the medley of buds unsavored—briar-rose, daisy and blue-eyed grasses, even the pink-pointing clover, best-loved of the bees—the flight is over, the queen-bee passes.

The Queen-Bee Flies

Back to the hive now, bride and widow and queen,
mother of all the hive to be; and the drones
follow after—all save one.

There is a murmuring in the comb, a sound of singing,
of bees' laughter, in the honey-comb: the
workers welcome their quickened queen.

But after—

There is a roaring in the comb, a sound of shrilling,
of bees' anger, in the honey-comb: the workers
sting to death the useless drones.

For she will give to the hive its race, worker and drone
as she will, lover of honey or lover of queen, she,
the mother of all the hive.

But never again the flight! The mad, gay flight
through the heart of June! Never again—never
again—

The queen-bee flies but once.

Does she remember that bridal-height? Does she
dream in her cell of the sun, of the drones' fierce
song? Or the song of the swiftest drone of all,
who dared to fly with her, dared to conquer her,

The Queen-Bee Flies

Dared to die of the pang supreme?

Does she dare to dream?

After the flight the long, long night of the hive. The queen-bee gives to the hive its race, worker and drone as she will: she seeks new hives as the old hives fill—her scouts will find them, in stranger-wood, in some hidden hollow—and the old bees follow, leaving the hive to the younger bees, the hive and the honey behind them.

Four summers—five summers perhaps—and then—

She knows the final flight of all.

La reine est morte! Vive la reine!

Vive la reine.—High on the breeze flies the virgin-queen, on young, gold wings—she flies—she flies—and they follow, the passionate bees!

* * * * *

Autumn stands in her russet meadows—bursting thistle, fern and aster and goldenrod—where still a thousand, thousand bees buzz at the cup of summer's lees.

Carmelites of June, build high those waxen temples: they shall endure.

The Queen-Bee Flies

Fill them with the honey-souls of flowers, like saints
in their dim niches: they will listen.

Fill them with the golden dew of all fields and of all
times;

With a patient worship in the dusk of your celibate-
cells;

With your low, slow song, praising—praising—
eternity-long!

THE SILENCE

I HEARD through tears my tearless songs
Call each to each in woods of pain,
“Sweet rain—sweet rain—!”

I said, if they can lift such notes
From such dark boughs, how they will sing
Love’s blossoming!

How they will burst the buds of sound,
And match the sun’s gold flowering,
How they will sing!

It is not so! It is not so!
There are no tunes for my hushed birds,
There are no words.

Love is the silence on God’s lips,
To which my songs with folded wing
Lean listening.

ANSWER

LOVE, you have broken my wings—I cried—
And oh, the sky!
Never, never to lift me high!

Only the broken-winged can fly.
Look!—Love replied.

Love, you have shattered the songs of me
And oh, the pain!
Never, never to sing again!

Singing lives on when song is dead.
Listen!—Love said.

There is a sky for a broken wing,
That I have found;
And in the stillness after song,
There is a Sound!

THE EGO CRIES ITSELF!

A VOICE called unto me: Know this thing!
I am the voice of your listening,
Calling too loud for you to hear,
I am your distance that lies too near
For you to see!—
And mine was the voice that spoke to me.

I am the door self-barred that stands
Between your prisoned and imprisoning hands,
The uninvited that entering,
Is host and guest at his own spread board,
And calls to himself his welcoming.

The voice spoke on and the voice was mine:
I am my thirst and my poured-out wine,
I am my hunger and I, my bread,
I am the path that my own feet tread;
Myself the master of me the slave,
And my hand shall take what that same hand gave.

Oh I am weary! *the voice cried on:*
I am fatigue that I rest upon,

The Ego Cries Itself!

I am the pain that shall heal my pain,
I am the loss that must count its gain;
For I robbed my own riches! So shall I be
A beggar that lives on my charity.

Now cried the voice and I heard my soul:
I the scattered, contain the whole,
I am the altar and altared there,
I am God with God: and I shall dare
To be my prayer and to grant my prayer!

For I the atom, am Entity.
I am the thought of the Thought to Be.
And the God I created, created me.

*The jar is sealed:
Memories—mourners—close the tomb,
Turn from the unechoing gloom
Into the sounding day:
Soul, freed and healed,
Away!
The jar is sealed.*



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